

.....STATEMENT OF REP. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN  
JUNE 13, 2002

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
FILIPINO VETERANS BENEFITS

**MR. CHAIRMAN, I WANT TO THANK YOU AND THE MEMBERS OF THE HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE THIS HEARING TODAY TO EXAMINE THE NEWLY INTRODUCED LEGISLATION, H.R. 4904. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO YOU FOR INVITING ME TO TESTIFY BEFORE THIS SUBCOMMITTEE ON A SUBJECT DEAR TO MY HEART, BENEFITS FOR FILIPINO VETERANS OF WORLD WAR II.**

**AS MANY OF YOU MAY KNOW, I HAVE LONG BEEN AN ADVOCATE OF FILIPINO VETERANS IN THE CONGRESS. FOR THE PAST SEVERAL CONGRESSES, I HAVE INTRODUCED LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE FULL VETERANS BENEFITS TO OUR FILIPINO COMRADES IN ARMS FROM WORLD WAR II. I HAVE LONG BELIEVED THAT THESE VETERANS WERE UNJUSTLY STRIPPED OF THESE BENEFITS, WHICH THEY WERE BY LAW ENTITLED TO, AS A RESULT OF THE RECISSION ACT OF 1946.**

**BEFORE I ADDRESS THE SPECIFICS OF THE LEGISLATION BEING CONSIDERED IN THIS HEARING, I WOULD LIKE TO BRIEFLY REFLECT UPON THIS HISTORY OF THIS ISSUE.**

**ON JULY 26, 1941, PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT ISSUED A MILITARY ORDER, PURSUANT TO THE PHILIPPINES INDEPENDENCE ACT OF 1934, CALLING MEMBERS OF THE PHILIPPINE COMMONWEALTH ARMY INTO THE SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES FORCES OF THE FAR EAST, UNDER THE COMMAND OF LT. GENERAL DOUGLAS MacArthur.**

**FOR ALMOST FOUR YEARS, OVER ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND FILIPINOS, OF THE PHILIPPINE COMMONWEALTH ARMY FOUGHT ALONGSIDE THE ALLIES TO RECLAIM THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS FROM JAPAN. REGRETTABLY, IN RETURN, CONGRESS ENACTED THE RESCISSION ACT OF 1946. THIS MEASURE LIMITED VETERANS ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITIES AND DEATH COMPENSATION AND ALSO DENIED THE MEMBERS OF THE PHILIPPINE COMMONWEALTH ARMY THE HONOR OF BEING RECOGNIZED AS VETERANS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES.**

**A SECOND GROUP, THE SPECIAL PHILIPPINE SCOUTS CALLED "NEW SCOUTS" WHO ENLISTED IN THE U.S. ARMED FORCES AFTER OCTOBER 6, 1945, PRIMARILY TO PERFORM OCCUPATION DUTY IN THE PACIFIC, WERE SIMILARLY EXCLUDED FROM BENEFITS.**

**THESE MEMBERS OF THE PHILIPPINE COMMONWEALTH ARMY AND THE SPECIAL**

**PHILIPPINE SCOUTS SERVED JUST AS COURAGEOUSLY AS THEIR AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS DURING THE PACIFIC WAR. THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS HELPED TO DISRUPT THE INITIAL JAPANESE OFFENSIVE'S TIMETABLE IN 1942, AT A POINT WHEN THE JAPANESE WERE EXPANDING UNCHECKED THROUGH THE WESTERN PACIFIC.**

**THIS DELAY IN THE JAPANESE PLANS HELPED TO BUY VALUABLE TIME FOR THE SCATTERED ALLIED FORCES TO REGROUP, REORGANIZE AND PREPARE FOR CHECKING THE JAPANESE ADVANCE IN THE BATTLES OF THE CORAL SEA AND MIDWAY. MANY HAVE FORGOTTEN HOW DARK THOSE DAYS BEFORE THE VICTORY AT MIDWAY REALLY WERE.**

**THESE ACTIONS ALSO EARNED THE FILIPINO SOLDIERS THE WRATH OF THEIR JAPANESE CAPTORS. AS A RESULT, MANY OF THEM JOINED THEIR AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS IN THE BATAAN DEATH MARCH, AND SUFFERED INHUMANE TREATMENT WHICH REDEFINED THE LIMITS OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY.**

**DURING THE NEXT TWO YEARS, FILIPINO SCOUT UNITS, OPERATING FROM MOBILE ISOLATED BASES IN THE RURAL INTERIOR OF THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS, CONDUCTED AN ONGOING CAMPAIGN OF GUERRILLA WARFARE, TYING DOWN PRECIOUS JAPANESE RESOURCES AND MANPOWER.**

**IN 1944, FILIPINO FORCES PROVIDED VALUABLE ASSISTANCE IN THE LIBERATION OF THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS WHICH IN TURN BECAME AN IMPORTANT BASE FOR TAKING THE WAR TO THE JAPANESE HOMELAND. WITHOUT THE ASSISTANCE OF FILIPINO UNITS AND GUERRILLA FORCES, THE LIBERATION OF THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS WOULD HAVE TAKEN MUCH LONGER AND BEEN FAR COSTLIER THAN IT ACTUALLY WAS.**

**IN A LETTER TO CONGRESS DATED MAY 16, 1946, PRESIDENT HARRY S. TRUMAN WROTE: "THE PHILIPPINE ARMY VETERANS ARE NATIONALS OF THE UNITED STATES AND WILL CONTINUE IN THAT STATUS AFTER JULY 4, 1946. THEY FOUGHT UNDER THE AMERICAN FLAG AND UNDER THE DIRECTION OF OUR MILITARY LEADERS. THEY FOUGHT WITH GALLANTRY AND COURAGE UNDER THE MOST DIFFICULT CONDITIONS DURING THE RECENT CONFLICT. THEY WERE COMMISSIONED BY US, THEIR OFFICIAL ORGANIZATION, THE ARMY OF ITS PHILIPPINE COMMONWEALTH WAS TAKEN INTO THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES ON JULY 26, 1941. THAT ORDER HAS NEVER BEEN REVOKED AND AMENDED. I CONSIDER IT A MORAL OBLIGATION OF THE UNITED STATES TO LOOK AFTER THE WELFARE OF THE FILIPINO VETERANS."**

**IN RECENT YEARS, THOSE OF US WHO CHAMPION THE CAUSE OF FILIPINO VETERANS HAVE WON SEVERAL SMALL, BUT IMPORTANT VICTORIES. THIS PROCESS BEGAN IN 1996 WITH THE ISSUANCE OF A PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION HONORING THE SERVICE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF FILIPINO VETERANS IN WORLD WAR II. IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS, THE CONGRESS ELECTED TO RAISE DISABILITY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION PAYMENTS TO FILIPINO VETERANS WHO WERE U.S. CITIZENS LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES TO A LEVEL EQUAL TO THEIR AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS. FOLLOWING THIS, THE CONGRESS THEN PERMITTED THOSE FILIPINO VETERANS RECEIVING SSI PAYMENTS TO KEEP THESE PAYMENTS UPON RETURN TO THE PHILIPPINES, WITH A 25% REDUCTION.**

**TODAY, WE ARE HERE TO DISCUSS A BILL THAT MAKES THREE IMPORTANT CHANGES TO BENEFITS FOR FILIPINO VETERANS. FIRST, IT PERMITS FILIPINO VETERANS RESIDING IN THE U.S. TO USE THE VA MEDICAL SYSTEM FOR NON-SERVICE CONNECTED TREATMENT.**

**SECOND, IT EXTENDS FULL COMPENSATION RATES FOR WIDOWS AND DEPENDENTS OF THOSE VETERANS WHO BECAME ELIGIBLE FOR THE RATE INCREASE SEVERAL YEARS AGO. THE WIDOWS AND DEPENDENTS HAD BEEN INADVERTENTLY EXCLUDED WHEN THE RATE INCREASE WAS APPROVED FOR THE VETERANS WITH SERVICE-CONNECTED INJURIES.**

**FINALLY, THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, THROUGH SECRETARY PRINCIPI, HAS AGREED TO REINSTATE THE \$500,000 ANNUAL GRANT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES FOR THE PURCHASE AND MAINTENANCE OF EQUIPMENT AT THE VETERANS MEMORIAL CENTER IN MANILA.**

**I AM PLEASED THAT THOSE OF US WHO HAVE CHAMPIONED THE CAUSE OF OUR FILIPINO WORLD WAR II BRETHREN, HAVE BEEN ABLE TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH BOTH THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND THE HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE TO OFFER A VIABLE SOLUTION TO ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THIS IMPORTANT GROUP.**

**IT IS FURTHER FITTING THAT THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE COMMITTEE HAVE MOVED TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE AT A TIME WHEN AMERICAN AND FILIPINO FORCES ARE FIGHTING SIDE BY SIDE AGAINST A COMMON ENEMY IN THE ONGOING WAR ON TERRORISM.**

**I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO COMMEND THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, AND IN PARTICULAR, SECRETARY PRINCIPI, FOR GIVING THIS ENTIRE ISSUE THE ATTENTION IT DESERVED. FAR TOO LITTLE PROCESS WAS MADE IN THE 1990S IN PART BECAUSE OF A SENSE OF INDIFFERENCE, IF NOT HOSTILITY, FROM THE PRIOR ADMINISTRATION ON THE ISSUE OF FILIPINO VETERANS. WHILE WE OFTEN RECEIVED ASSURANCES FROM PREVIOUS SECRETARIES THAT THEY WERE GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE OF OUR EFFORTS, SECRETARY PRINCIPI WAS THE FIRST TO SIT DOWN WITH MEMBERS AND WORK TOWARDS A NEGOTIATED RESULT.**

**MR. CHAIRMAN, THESE VETERANS PLAYED A VITAL ROLE IN THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC, AND FOR FAR TOO LONG, NEITHER THEIR WARTIME SERVICE, NOR OUR DEBT TO THEM, WAS PROPERLY ACKNOWLEDGED. THIS SUBCOMMITTEE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER THE CAUSE OF JUSTICE TODAY, AND I AM GRATEFUL THAT YOU HAVE AGREED TO EXAMINE THIS IMPORTANT ISSUE, AND THIS TIMELY AND APPROPRIATE MEASURE.**

**I WANT TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO BOTH YOU MR. CHAIRMAN, AND THE MEMBERS OF THIS SUBCOMMITTEE, FOR PERMITTING ME TO TESTIFY AT THIS HEARING.**